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BOOK REVIEW Open Access

Review of "Healing the Herds: Disease, Livestock Economies, and the Globalization of Veterinary Medicine" edited by Karen Brown and Daniel Gilfoyle

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Book details

Brown K, Gilfoyle D and (eds): *Healing the Herds: Disease, Livestock Economies, and the Globalization of Veterinary Medicine* Ohio University Press; 2009. 288 pages. ISBN-10: 0821418858 ISBN-13: 978-0821418857

Review

Through a series of 14 case studies, this multi-authored book examines the history of veterinary medicine and, particularly, the emergence of veterinary services and disease control programs in relation to livestock trade. For the case studies covering China, Australia, and New Zealand, and selected countries in South East Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean, the focus is the colonial era up to the early 1960s or earlier. The case studies often show how advances in veterinary science from the late nineteenth century and technologies such as vaccines enabled large-scale disease control or eradication programs. For countries experiencing these programs for the first time, however, the book proposes that the primary objectives were related to colonial expansion and aims such as the protection of livestock on colonial farms, export trade and, at times, to support the appropriation of land.

Only three of the case studies in the book deal with veterinary-related topics in pastoralist areas in Australia and Kenya (two chapters). David Anderson's chapter on livestock marketing and colonial ambitions, between 1918 and 1948, clearly lays out the broader economic context within which livestock disease control programs were designed and implemented at that time. This chapter also presents a good overview of debates around overstocking and compulsory and voluntary destocking.

The chapter by Lotte Hughes describes the forced displacement of Maasai communities from land that was thought to have a lower risk of East Coast fever and therefore was the preferred land for settler cattle. The common theme in these three chapters is the tension between the differing priorities of local herd owners, and those of governments and state veterinary services, and the imposition of disease control strategies often by force. A fourth chapter by Saverio Krätli deals with the history of cattle

breeding policy in Niger and the marginalization of the indigenous pastoral Bororo breed. Although somewhat marginal to the veterinary focus of the book, this well-researched chapter reinforces a general pattern of negative attitudes towards pastoralism by government.

When introducing the book, Karen Brown and Daniel Gilfoyle present an argument that advances in veterinary science were used by colonialists as a means to further their own economic ambitions or as "tools for empire." This perhaps is no surprise if viewed from the wider perspective of the use of new agricultural technologies in general by colonial administrations as a means to exploit resources. The crop, forestry, water, fisheries, and other sectors all employed the modern technologies of the day, and if so, veterinary science was no different. The two Kenya chapters dealing with pastoralist areas, especially the chapter by Lotte Hughes, leave an impression that veterinary policies and programs were universally harmful to pastoralists. Here, a more balanced view might have noted the considerable benefits to pastoralists of programs such as rinderpest control. When recalling this disease, pastoralists quickly recognize that enforced and, at times, draconian approaches to rinderpest vaccination did indeed produce massive and sustained benefits.

For researchers interested in more recent debates about pastoralism, the book is a useful resource for understanding the history of livestock disease policies in specific countries and the long history of disease control priorities being linked to trade priorities. When viewed in relation to pastoralist policy debates in Africa today, what is striking is the extent to which post-colonial African governments have continued to follow colonial-type thinking on pastoralism and often view these areas as problems to be solved by modernization and settlement. To some extent, the anti-pastoralist statements of current African policy makers seem even more extreme and derogatory than those expressed during the colonial period. Similarly, the appropriation of pastoral lands is not only a colonial behavior but, of course, continues today with high-level government support. While the Kenyan colonial administration may have indeed provided unbalanced veterinary services with limited access for pastoralists, as described in the book, times have not really changed.

Competing interests
The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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